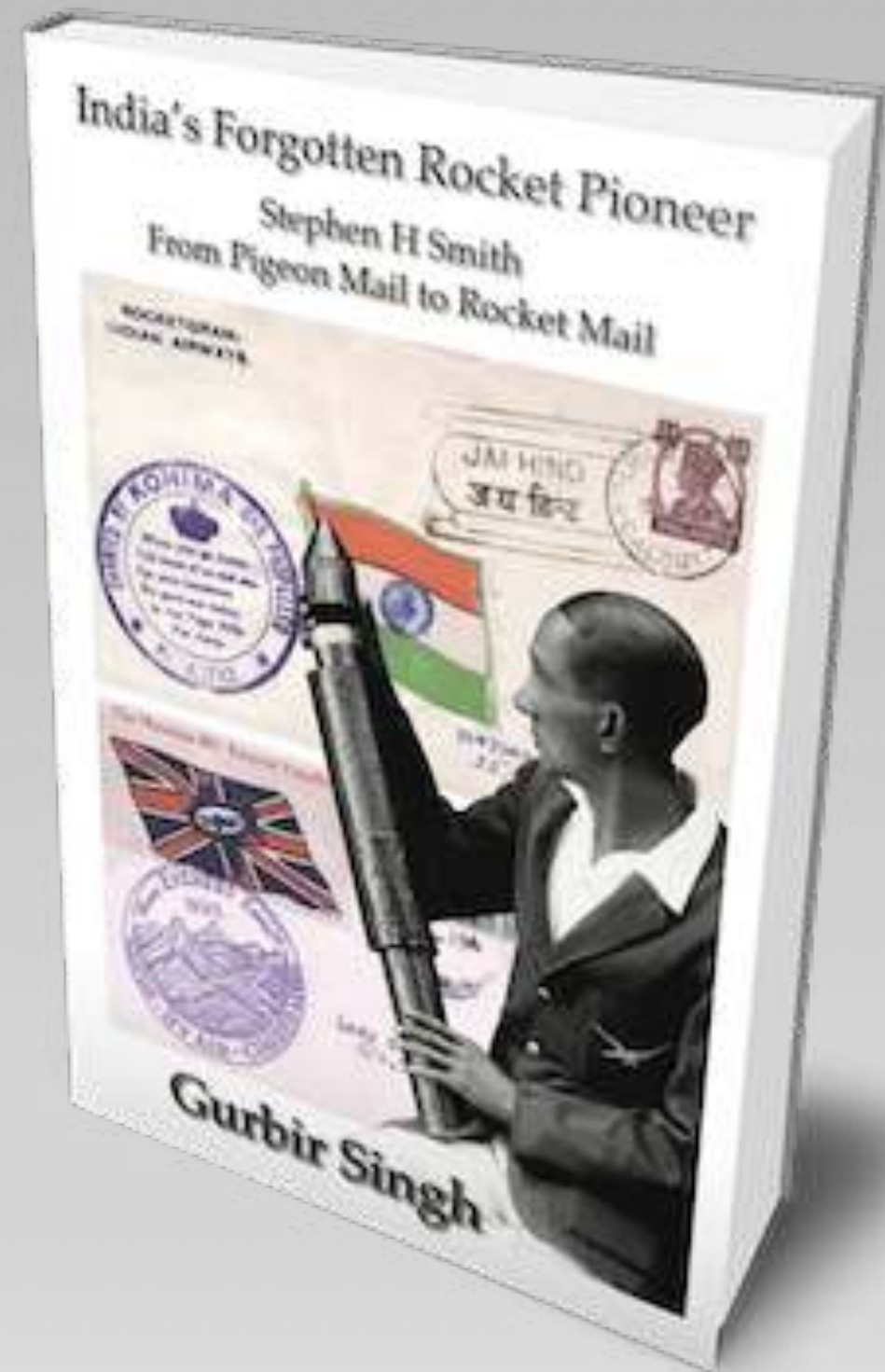




India's Forgotten Rocket Pioneer

India's Forgotten Rocket Pioneer & the British Interplanetary Society



The Plan

- The Life of Stephen Smith
- Researching and Writing the Book
- Stephen Smith, Leslie Johnson and the BIS
- Stephen Smith – Legacy



Stephen Smith and the BIS

Journal of the British Interplanetary Society

13

ANALECTA

Lack of space has necessitated the omission of the usual list of new members. Since the publication of the previous *Journal*, eight new members have been elected. Their names will be given in the next issue.

* * * *

Professor Nikolas Rinin, Ing. Friedrich Schmiedl, and Herr Willy Ley, three of Europe's leading rocket experimenters, have recently been elected honorary members of the American Rocket Society.

* * * *

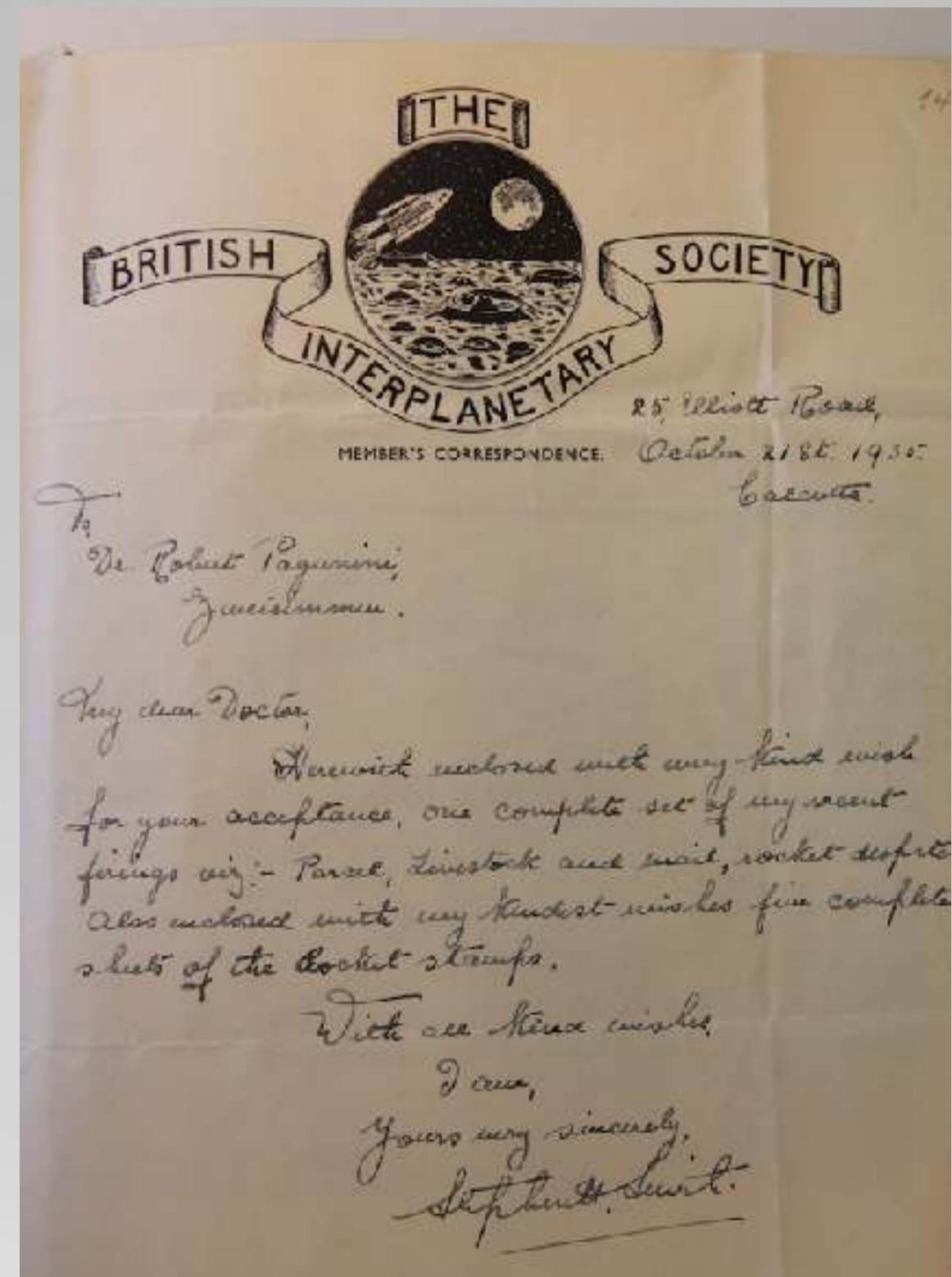
The coming publication of Mr. P. E. Cleator's book, *Rockets Through Space*, by Messrs. George Allen and Unwin Limited, promises to be an event of no small importance in the world of rocketry. Further details will be found in the Publisher's announcement on page 14.

* * * *

What is said to be the first transportation by rockets of animate objects is claimed for Mr. S. H. Smith, our new Calcutta member. On June 29th last, Mr. Smith successfully shot a rocket over the Damodar River containing two live birds and nearly two hundred letters. A detailed account of this, and other, experiments by Mr. Smith is to be found in the *Star of India*, dated July 1st, 1935.

* * * *

Members are reminded that Society notepaper may be obtained from the Hon. Secretary at a nominal charge of 2/6



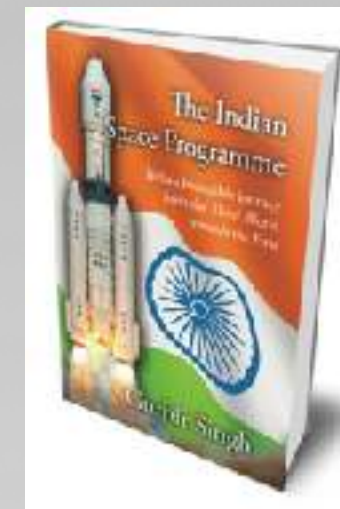
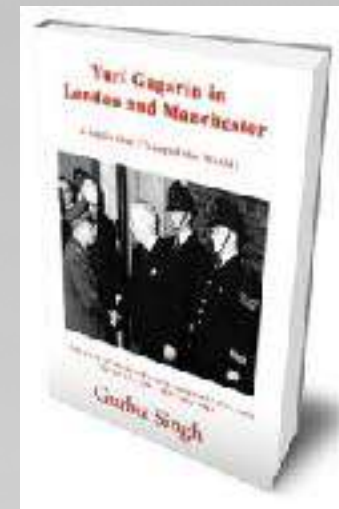
JBIS Volume 2 No 2 10 1935



Introduction

I host a not for profit astronomy podcast
– Astrotalkuk.org

I am an author. I write on my blog,
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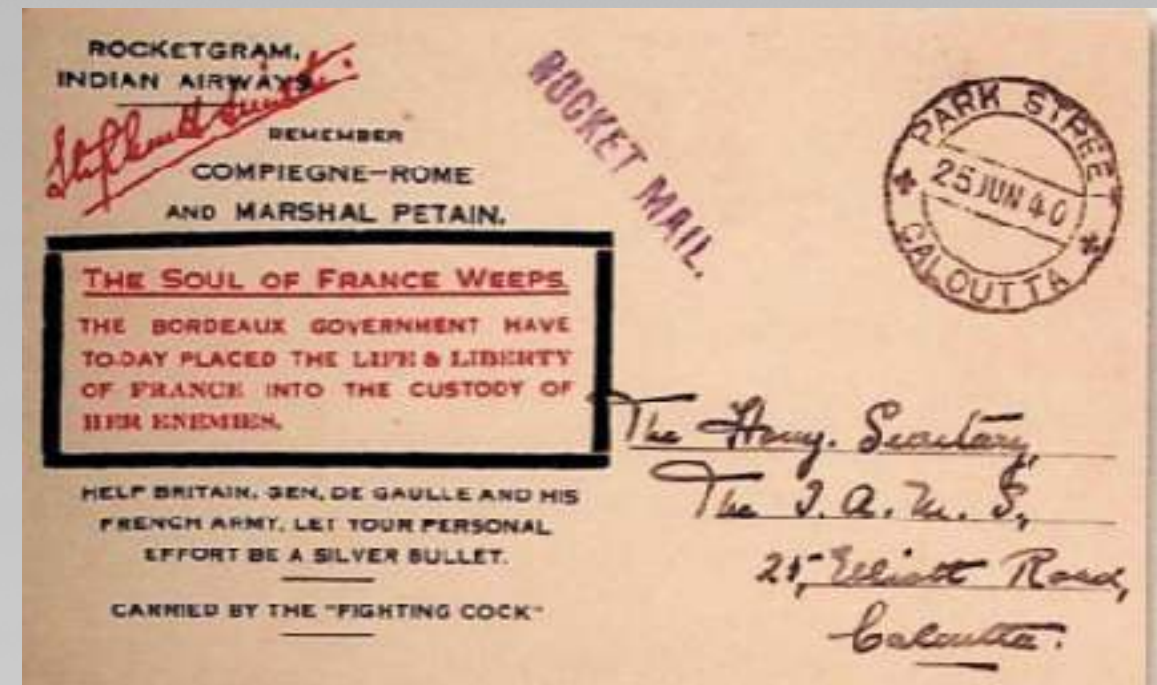
www.astrotalkuk.org <https://www.linkedin.com/in/gurbirsinghinfosec/>



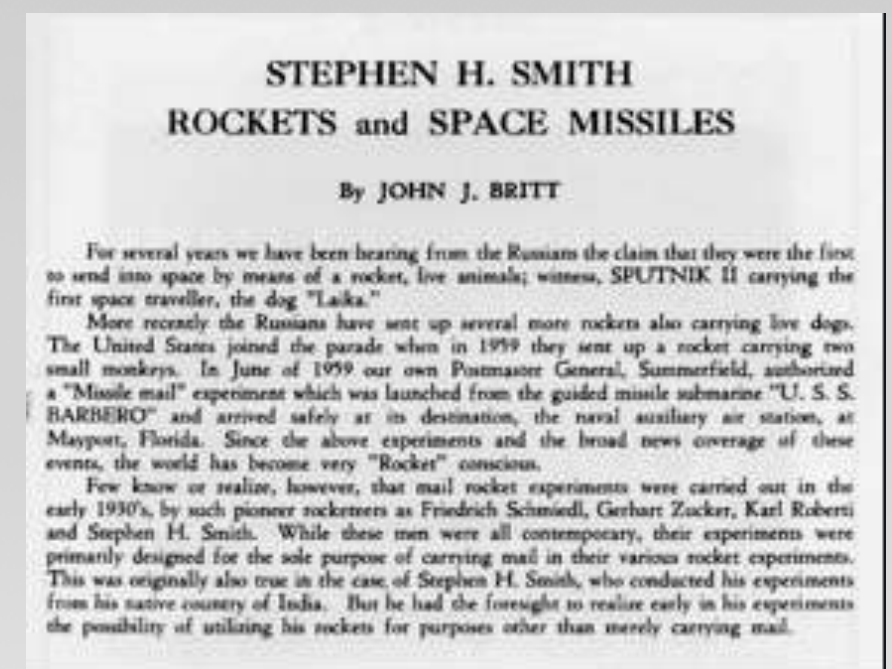


The Life of Stephen Smith

- Born in Assam – 1891
- Worked as a Customs Official, Policeman and a dentist
- About 300 Rocket mail experiments between 1934 and 1944
- Numerous international contacts
- Last 20 years of his life - tumultuous
- International Philatelic community aware of his contribution but not beyond.
- Personal effects come up for sale in Florida



Cover above flown on Rocket on 25 June 1940.
One flown on 17 July 1940 was valued in 2018
at 20,000 Euros





India's Forgotten Rocket Pioneer

- First wrote about [Stephen Smith in 2014](#).
- Purchase <https://astrotalkuk.org/indias-forgotten-rocket-rocket-pioneer/>
33% discount code = YYFEP4DR

Book took over two years to complete. More details [here](#) to see display below



Sources: Sikkim



Rajan
19/10/56

(R) 19 P.P. No. 881

SIKKIM STATE.

General Department.

File No. 7 of 1954

Serial No. 5

FILE HEADING.

Propose visit of Mr. Stephen Smiles
to Sikkim
for Rocket Motor Experiments

CONTINUED FROM FILE NO. _____ OF 19 ____

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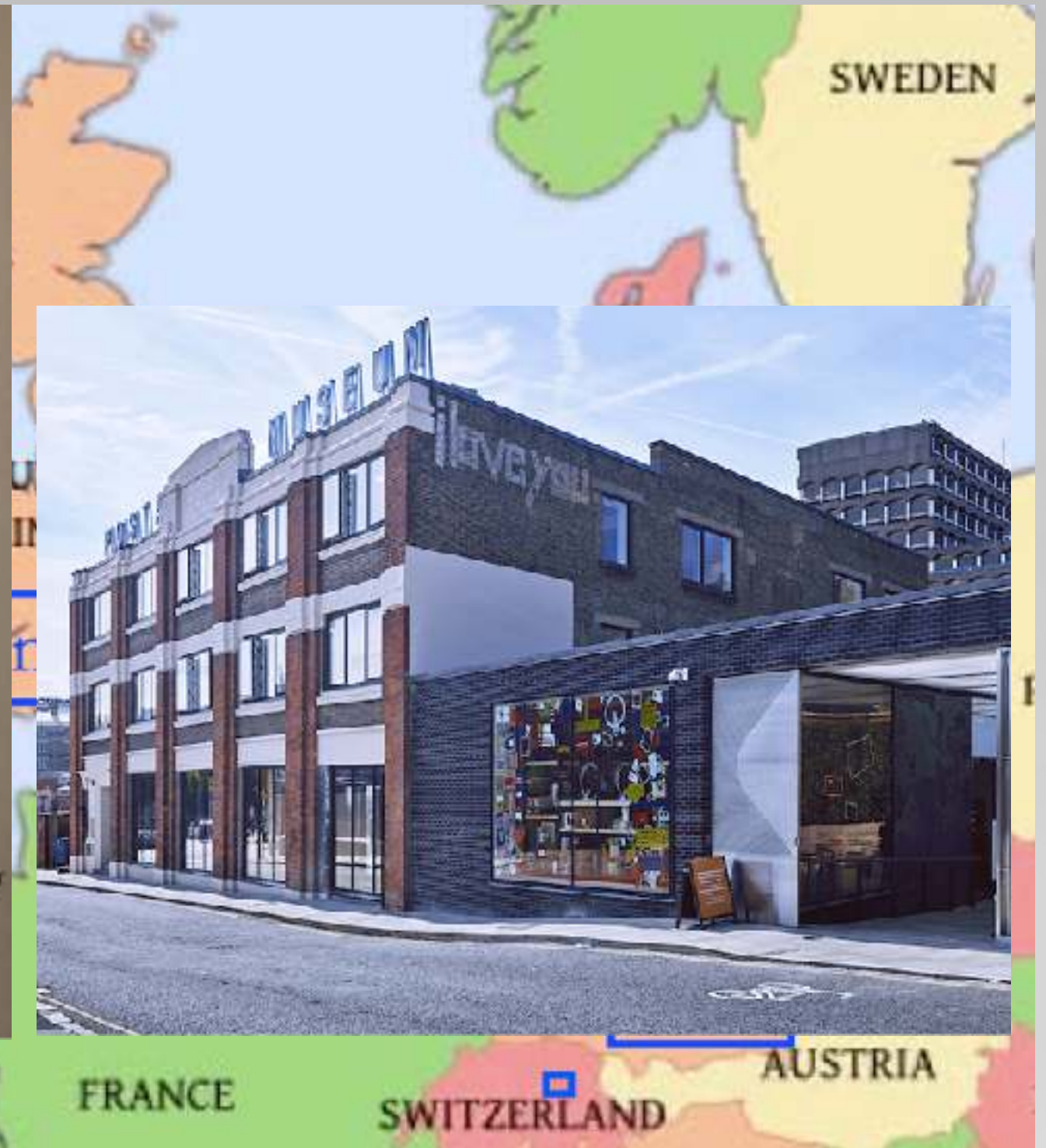
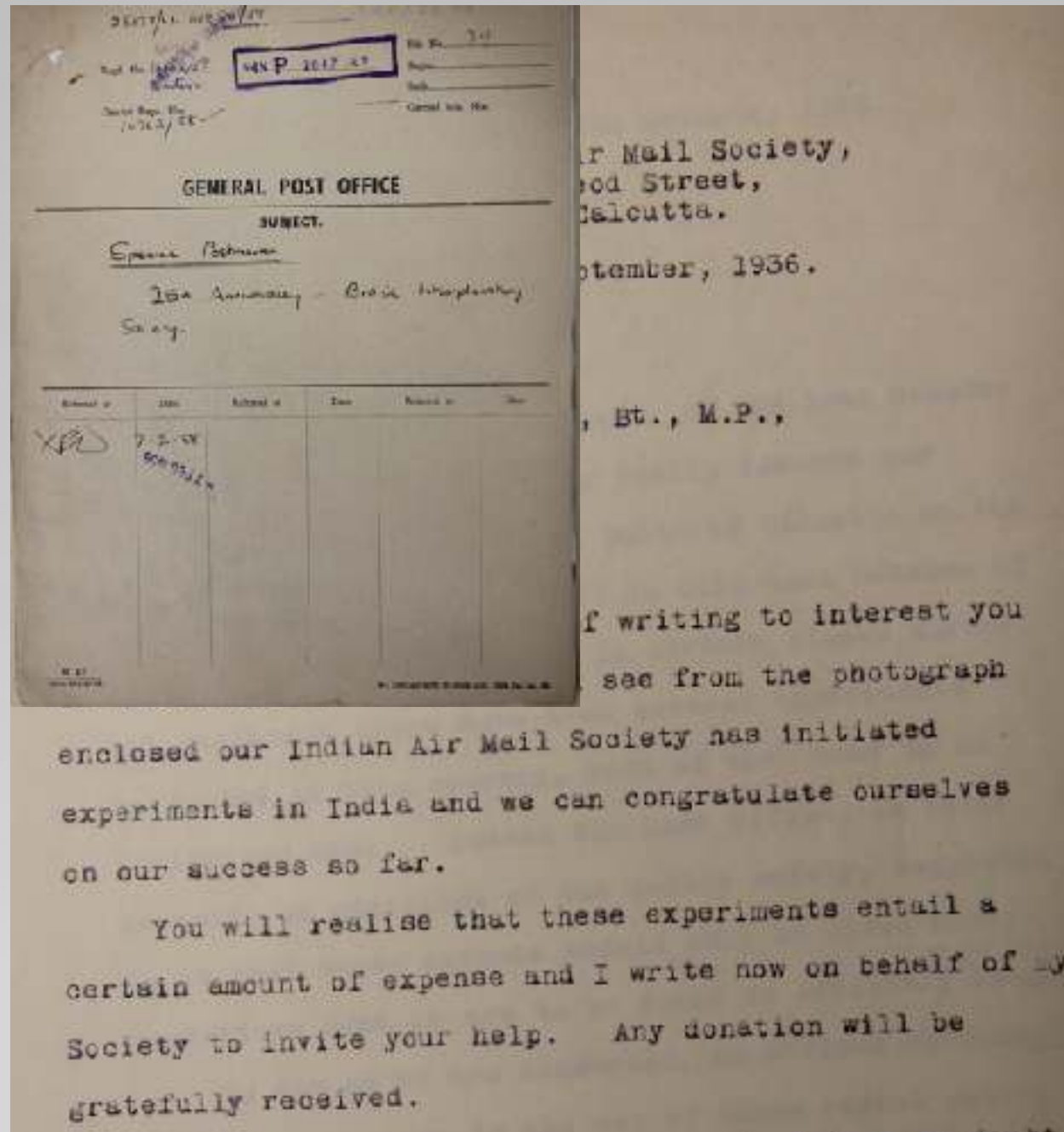
REFERENCE TO OTHER CONNECTED PAPERS _____

FRANCE SWITZERLAND

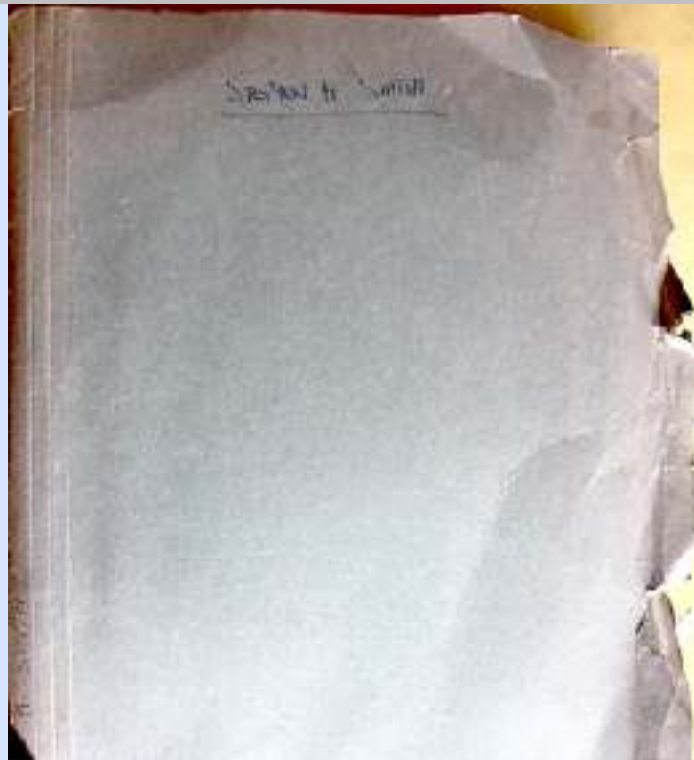
Sources: Bern



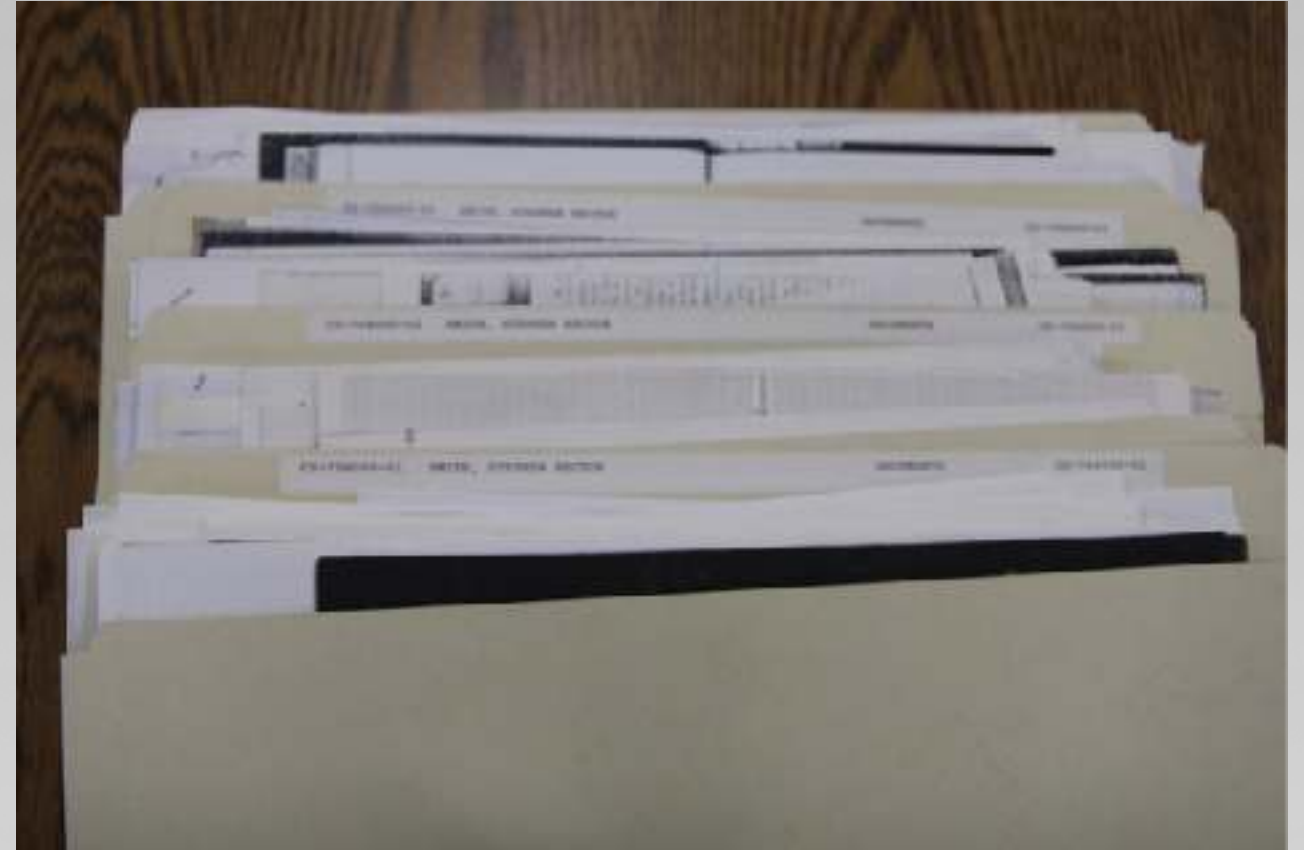
Sources: London



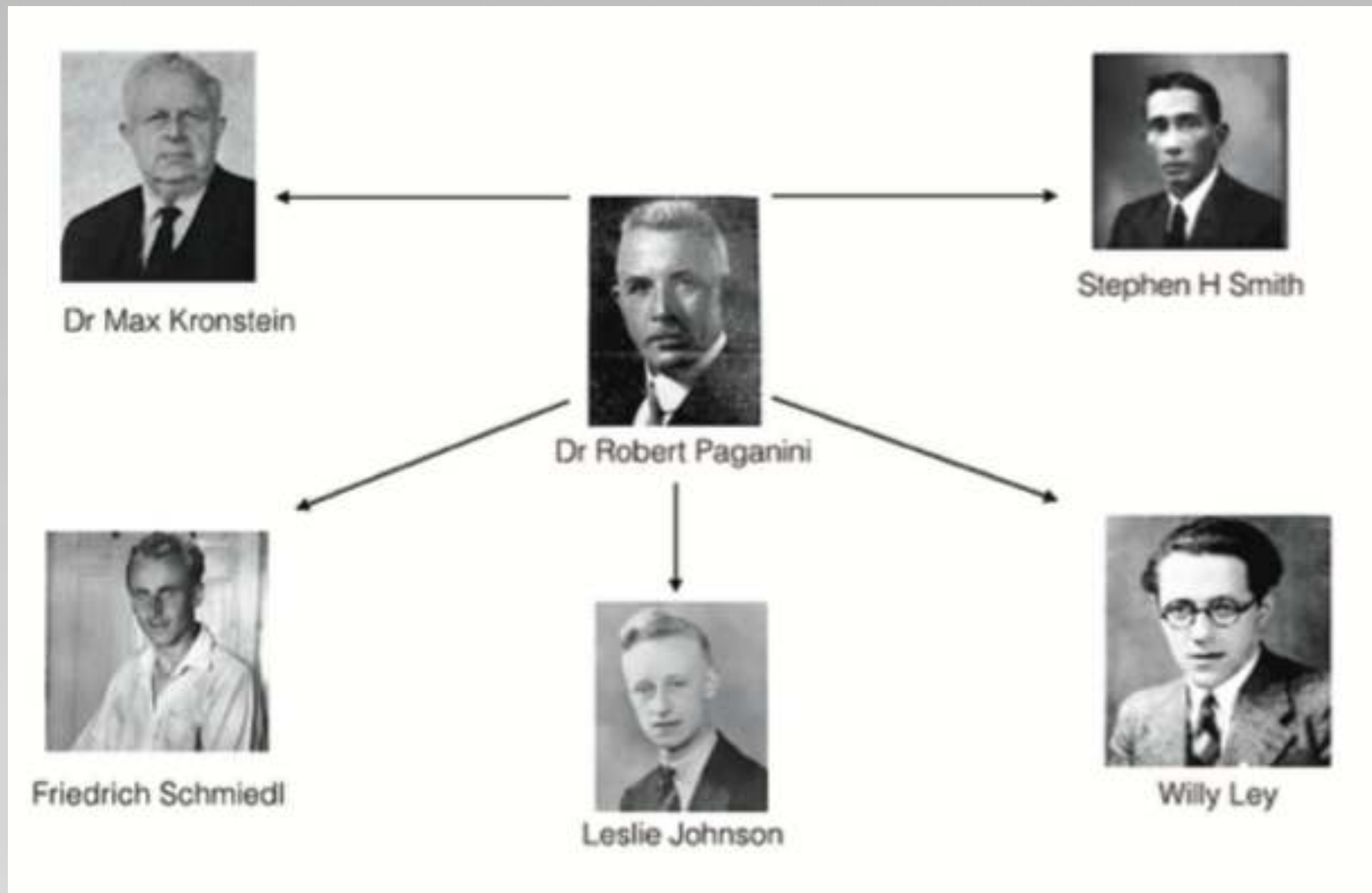
Sources: Liverpool



Smithsonian – Washington DC



International Connections



International Connections



Philately and Airships

- Smith established the Indian Air Mail Society in Calcutta in 1924.
- Member of the philatelic societies in UK, Europe and USA. Joined the BIS in late 1934.
- Produced, collected and dealt in mail covers of many type – pigeon, first day covers, mount Everest, airmail and rocket mail.
- Wrote 5 books and produced 8 more that were never published.
- His personal collection was dispersed with in India and beyond.



Will Ley - Rocket Mail

1927 One of the earliest members of the VfR 1927

1935 Came to Liverpool.

1936 First rocket mail attempt in US 1936. Later he regarded rocket mail as a “gimmick”.

1959 – Missile Mail. Postmaster General “We stand on the threshold of rocket mail”





Dr Robert Paganini

- Chemical Engineer. Two decades older than Smith. Compiled the first Airmail catalogue from 1912. Father of Swiss philately. Established contact with Smith from 1924.
- Dr Max Kronstein – Born in Basel. Studied in Karlsruhe. Wounded in the battle of the Somme. POW in England and then Netherlands. Emigrated to USA in 1939. Learnt about Smith from Paganini. “the greatest one man campaign for rocketry”
- Friedrich Schmiedl - conducted his rocket mail demonstration in September 1931. Technically very competent. Destroyed his research. Complained “I haven't become anybody ”

Leslie Johnson

- Founder Fellow, Treasurer, Secretary, Vice president. Established a link Stephen Smith from late 1934.
- Mutually supported each other . Letter dated 31 Aug 1938

You may be assured that I will do everything in my power to assist the Keystone Press Agency on your behalf, should they make any enquiries from me.

Your information re Sir David and Lady Esra is very interesting. You may be assured I'll write to them as soon as I can find time, and if I am in London during the next six months will make an appointment to see them. Do you think they would care to meet any of the London BIS members? I would not care to unloose the hounds on Sir David without first learning from you that it was in order to do so!

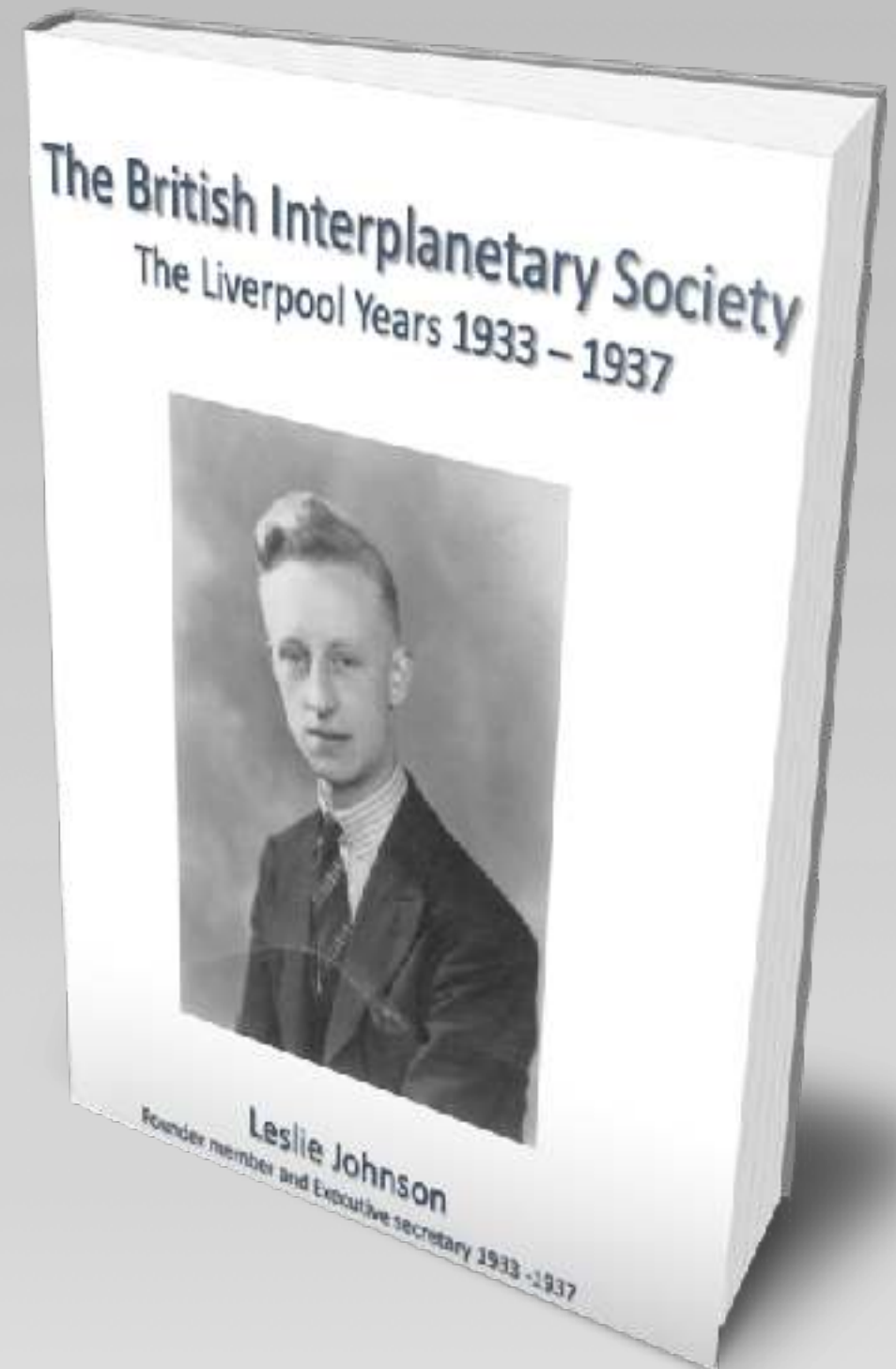
Published a short story – 'Tales of Wonder, Tales of Wonder in 1938. "Satellites of Death".



BIS – The Liverpool Years

Coming soon

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Legacy

Smith worked alone and unsupported. Reached out to the military and the politicians but no response.



First meeting of The International Astronautical Congress 30 Sep 1950



Summary

- Stephen Smith failed to attract support financial, political or technical. Worked alone – limited technical achievements.
- The civil unrest of last two decades of his life – particularly tumultuous. Push for independence, WW2, Famine, Independence, partition rioting. Illness.
- Attempted to engage engineers to work with him, military, pre- and post independence government all to no avail.

Questions



Links

1. [Astrotalkuk.org](https://www.astrotalkuk.org) – [Episode 68](#) from 2014. Archive material from [March 2020](#).
2. Look [inside the book](#). Purchase book. Use 33% discount code = YYFEP4D [only on this link](#).
3. Indian [Airmails.com](https://www.airmails.com) – Piyush Khaitan. Other [useful links](#).
4. [Royal Philatelic Society](#), [The India Circle](#),
5. [British Interplanetary Society](#)